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**Reinforcing Divisions and Blurring Boundaries:
Race, Identity and the Contradictions of
Johannesburg Soccer Fandom**

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Reinforcing Divisions and Blurring Boundaries: Race, Identity and the Contradictions of Johannesburg Soccer Fandom¹

With the hosting of sports mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, wide ranging claims that sport can unify peoples and nations are regularly espoused by the media, and sporting and political elites. During the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the *Sowetan* declared that Bafana Bafana had “*basked in the glory of a loving nation*”,² while *The Star* claimed that “*We finally have national pride*”.³ Danny Jordaan, the CEO of South Africa’s World Cup organising committee, claimed that, “*If there is one thing on this planet that has the power to bind people together it is football*”.⁴ However, such claims often treat soccer as a blank canvas, devoid of its social and cultural significance. This paper begins to fill this canvas. Ethnographies of, and semi-structured interviews with the Johannesburg branches of the respective Manchester United and Kaizer Chiefs supporters’ clubs during 2008/2009 revealed ideas of distance, dislocation and difference that were both reinforced and challenged. The predominantly white, middle class Manchester United supporters articulated feelings of marginalisation, a sense of distance, and fear of crime in the post-apartheid city. They replicated the chants of Old Trafford while mentally distancing themselves from the city in which they were located. In contrast, the black, working class Chiefs supporters were often located in areas marked by urban decay. While claiming to follow European football, they were often restricted due to lack of access to money, satellite television and internet. Yet, there are alternative understandings of the city’s football fandom. Within this fandom emerge physical and psychological ‘borderlands’ where “*where two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory*”.⁵ Through a series of encounters emerge alternative identities in Johannesburg soccer fandom, which challenge these boundaries.

Sport, race, class and creolisation

Sports spectatorship is not merely an imposed mass culture nor is it simply a space in which subaltern groups can assert their identities. Understanding sport in the framework of wider popular culture places it in “an area of negotiation between the two.”⁶ Gramsci argued that hegemony is not a simple matter of an elite exercising power over subordinate groups but “*a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups.*”⁷ This non-

¹ A longer, more detailed version of this paper can be found in the forthcoming edited collection entitled *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs*, edited by Chuka Onwumehili and Gerard Akindes.

² ‘Mzansi Erupts for Bafana’. *Sowetan*, 10/06/2010.

³ ‘Bafana Fan Frenzy’. *The Star*, 10/06/2010.

⁴ FIFA.com, “Mandela: ‘We Accept with Humility and without Arrogance’,”

<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/archive/southafrica2010/news/newsid=92546/index.html>

⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 19.

⁶ Tony Bennett, “Introduction: Popular Culture and ‘the Turn to Gramsci,’” in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, ed. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), xiii.

⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 182.

reductionism and the subsequent recognition of the non-homogeneity of groups open up a new understanding of a fluidic interplay and reinterpretation of identities. Popular culture still retains the marginalised voices of the subaltern but this is no longer just in the context of resistance, although popular culture can still be such a vehicle. As Hall writes, popular culture still voices "*local hopes and local aspirations*" but these are now viewed as "*the everyday practices and everyday experiences of ordinary folks*"⁸ rather than exceptional experiences. Therefore, the cultural lens of sport not only reflects the identities of the supporters but is where they are actively negotiated and recoded.

Creolisation provides a theoretical crowbar in attempting to move beyond the concept of a divided soccer landscape in Johannesburg. It "*disturbs or destabilizes notions of fixed identities*"⁹ such as race and class, emphasising the fluidity of movement, travelling across borders and multiple social interactions between people. Nuttall describes creolisation as a series of "*mutual entanglements, some of them conscious but most of them unconscious*".¹⁰ Consequently, race and racial identities are "*no longer tied to apartheid-driven cultural absolutes, but instead rotates around the axes of political and social change in South Africa*".¹¹ Dolby utilises Bourdieu's concept of taste, an expression of the identity of the individual but bound up in the context, where structure and agency intertwine. Yet, as she recognises, taste is "*simultaneously flimsy and unstable*".¹² Creolisation and sport has been previously linked by Archetti, who argues that the playing style of the Argentinian national soccer team underwent a creolised process through immigration.¹³ Here, it is not the players but soccer fandom in Johannesburg that is questioned. Despite its colonial roots, soccer has been recoded in multiple forms by fans and supporters. However, creolisation is uneven and thus people are subjected to and participate in differently. Dolby utilises Appadurai's 'scapes' of global flows to address the variability in access to these flows. Those who are restricted to the margins of society, especially the poor, have limited means in which to access these global flows and participate in globalised communities of identity.¹⁴

However, in using creolisation, it creates problems. Wasserman and Jacobs argue that, "*exclusionary notions of identity based on race and ethnicity, are still operative among certain sectors of post-apartheid South African society*".¹⁵ Wasserman illustrates this with reference to the 'digital divide' in South Africa, contending that "*virtual South Africa still*

⁸ Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 469.

⁹ Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, "Introduction: Imagining the Present," in *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

¹⁰ Sarah Nuttall, "Review: Jacobs on Nuttall - Senses of Culture: A Reply " H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online(2002), <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-safrica&month=0211&week=d&msg=JnQ23orh9yr8s7a1YExKuw&user=&pw>.

¹¹ Nadine Dolby, *Constructing Race: Youth, Identity, and Popular Culture in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 63.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ Eduardo P. Archetti, "Nationalism, Football and Polo: Tradition and Creolization in the Making of Modern Argentina," in *Locating Cultural Creativity*, ed. John Liep (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 104.

¹⁴ Dolby, *Constructing Race: Youth, Identity, and Popular Culture in South Africa*, 13.

¹⁵ Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs, "Introduction," in *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, ed. Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003), 3.

largely reflects actual South Africa".¹⁶ Despite attempting to move away from race and class as primary modes of understanding South Africa, such approaches are still bound by the salience of race and class in post-apartheid South Africa. This paper highlights some of these 'mutual entanglements' in which football supporters find themselves in. However, for all these moments, it remains extremely difficult to escape the notion of a divided soccercape.

Football in South Africa

While the history of South African soccer can be found elsewhere¹⁷, it remains imperative to highlight the contradictory nature of the sport in reinforcing and challenging racial identities. Apartheid football associations initially existed along racial lines.¹⁸ (FASA [white], SAIFA [Indian], SACFA [Coloured] and the rival SABFA [Bantu] and SAAFA [African]). Even when the government policy of 'multinationalism', allowing mixed race teams to represent the country, was implemented as a reaction to increasing sporting and political isolation in the 1970s, this was window dressing. At club level, soccer clubs remained segregated although enforcement was relaxed after the 1976 Soweto Uprising.¹⁹ Yet, apartheid soccer paradoxically muddied racial boundaries. Leagues such as the South African Soccer League (SASL) and the anti-racist Federation Professional League (FPL) encouraged players "*to play in racially mixed teams.*"²⁰ Alegi and Bolsmann argue, "*there was a broader trend blurring the boundaries between race, politics, football and big business*", which South African Breweries (SAB) epitomised.²¹ The emergence of televised black soccer in the late 1970s and early 1980s became a key target for white capital to advertise their products to "*millions of black households at a time when consumption among white households had slowed considerably*".²²

Post-apartheid sport has been similarly entwined in the reinforcing and blurring of racial divisions. The imagery from both the 1995 Rugby World Cup and 1996 Africa Cup of Nations when South Africa won both on home soil and Nelson Mandela presented the trophies to the respective winning captains, created moments, "*when South Africans formed a 'natural' community whose interests transcended individual differences and social conditions*".²³ However, the South African team competing at the 1996 African Nations Cup was met with

¹⁶ Herman Wasserman, "Dial-up Identity: South African Languages in Cyberspace," in *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, ed. Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003), 87.

¹⁷ See Alegi, Peter. *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2004; Archer, Robert, and Antoine Bouillon. *The South African Game: Sport and Racism*. London: Zed Press, 1982; Booth, Doug. *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa*. London: Frank Cass, 1998; and Nauright, John. *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa*. London: Leicester University Press, 1997.

¹⁸ These were the white-run Football Association of South Africa, South African Coloured Football Association (SACFA), South African Indian Football Association (SAIFA), and the rival organisations South Africa African Football Association (SAAFA) and the South African Bantu Football Association (SABFA).

¹⁹ Archer and Bouillon, *The South African Game*, 212.

²⁰ Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa*, 119.

²¹ Peter Alegi and Chris Bolsmann, "From Apartheid to Unity: White Capital and Black Power in the Racial Integration of South African Football, 1976–1992," *African Historical Review* 42, no. 2 (2010): 11.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Doug Booth, "The Antinomies of Multicultural Sporting Nationalism: A Case Study of Australia and South Africa," *International Sports Studies* 21, no. 2 (1999): 16.

indifference by the white population.²⁴ Since then, soccer has at times become the site of racial contestation and social segregation. Eyewitness accounts from the Ellis Park Stadium disaster in April 2001 alleged racial abuse from the white stadium security.²⁵ In contrast, the selection process for Bafana Bafana has not been subjected to such quotas, formal or informal. Nevertheless, Merrett, Tatz and Adair criticised the squad selection for the 2010 FIFA World Cup as it included just one white player, Matthew Booth.²⁶

Segregation in South African sports spectatorship remains through high ticket prices. During the research, the usual price for a (PSL) game was R20 - R30 (£1.60 - £2.40)²⁷ whereas top level domestic rugby matches ranged between R60 and R120 (£4.80 - £9.55); a vast difference. As Giulianotti asserts, high ticket prices can be seen as a conscious policy of "*commercial spectator engineering*"²⁸ preventing 'undesirables' from attending. Soccer is far more accessible for South Africans on low incomes than other major sports. The history of South African football reveals contradictory tensions, reinforcing racial identities and challenging them.

Reinforcing Divisions

Understanding the identities of both groups of supporters requires an understanding of the places that these supporters inhabited. Although they both claimed to represent Johannesburg, they represented different ideas of the city, as well as physical space. The United supporters would meet to watch United games at a sports bar in the affluent suburb of Dowerglen, which was actually in the neighbouring municipality. Many lived and worked in the wealthier northern suburbs, which was reflected in the locations they chose for the interviews. Located in a predominantly white, middle class suburb, the vast majority of the bar's clientele were white. Security measures shut the residents away from the everyday happenings outside those walls, while inside the bar, the supporters' sung the chants of match day at Old Trafford. In contrast, the Chiefs supporters were located in the CBD and the nearby areas of Joubert Park/ Hillbrow and Jeppestown/ Malvern. Unlike the leafy northern suburbs, these areas were marked by urban decay. My presence as a white man waiting on the corner of Smit and Twist with a group of Kaizer Chiefs supporters was an oddity in this environment. It was rare to see more than a handful of white fans at Chiefs games and there were times that I was the lone white person. On several occasions, Chiefs fans requested a photo with me to record the presence of a white man at a Chiefs match. White soccer fans were generally not expected to attend domestic soccer matches.

Many United supporters equated the domestic soccer landscape with crime and criminality, and as such felt unsafe going to these areas of the city. For instance, one supporter was

²⁴ Adrian Guelke and John Sugden, "Sport and the 'Normalising' of the New South Africa," in *Sport in Divided Societies*, ed. John Sugden and Alan Bairner (Oxford: Mayer & Mayer Sport, 1999), 90.

²⁵ Peter Alegi, "'Like Cows Driven to a Dip': The 2001 Ellis Park Stadium Disaster in South Africa," *Soccer and Society* 5, no. 2 (2004): 241-2.

²⁶ Christopher Merrett, Colin Tatz, and Daryl Adair, "History and Its Racial Legacies: Quotas in South African Rugby and Cricket," *Sport in Society* 14, no. 6 (2011): 769.

²⁷ Although post-World Cup, prices have risen to R40 (£3.20).

²⁸ Richard Giulianotti, "Sport Mega Events, Urban Football Carnivals and Securitised Commodification: The Case of the English Premier League," *Urban Studies* 48, no. 15 (2011), 3304.

worried that *"I'm going to get mugged on the way to the stadium"*.²⁹ Horror stories, including about razor blades slicing someone's eye,³⁰ were used as justification for ignoring the domestic game. Such fear of crime often had racial undertones, with one supporters believing that *"not to sound racist or anything but being the only white person or one of very few would be intimidating if I had to go with a small group of friends"*.³¹ It was widely felt that being white marked them out as targets. For the older members, such feelings of intimidation were entrenched in their experiences when the white-run National Football League collapsed forcing the teams to enter the black-run NPSL or the non-racial Federation Professional League. These supporters believed that their safety at the games was under threat from large crowds of black soccer fans. This fear of crime at local soccer matches was symptomatic of a wider fear of crime in the city. Many supporters lived with the architecture of fear on a daily basis. Electric fences, panic buttons and burglar bars were common fixtures in respondents' homes.

However, the racialised discourse of crime and fear was also articulated by some of the Chiefs supporters. After my compact camera was stolen at a Chiefs fixture, various members would escort me around the stadium at subsequent games to make sure that I would not be a victim of crime again. Following interviews reinforced this concept: *"Black people target them [white people] when they are in soccer stadiums. They see them as sheep amongst the goats... at FNB [Soccer City]"*.³² Such claims fuelled how the United supporters identified the locales where the domestic game took place, feeding back into discourse of crime and fear. I encountered a general unwillingness to travel to the township to watch a soccer match. In one interview, I was told that, *"if you said to me, 'There's a Chiefs v Pirates game on at the FNB Stadium. Why don't you drive along and go and see it?' Not a chance"*.³³ Essentially, these stadiums were located in what they often perceived as no-go areas of the city.

Marginalised and besieged identities were articulated in relation to domestic soccer. Tom boldly asserted that, *"the football is shit, it's corrupt, it's a racist sport, it's not coached properly, it's dangerous to go, it's not for white people"*.³⁴ This feeling of marginalisation fed into a wider identity of besiegement. Black economic empowerment (BEE) was a reoccurring topic that I encountered from the supporters in the bar and other patrons nearby. They complained that BEE unjustly discriminated against them as white people from finding jobs. George claimed that his daughter was emigrating to the UK because, *"She just wants to get out of South Africa. Fed up with it"*.³⁵ Compounding these feeling of marginalisation, the domestic game became a channel through which the United supporters articulated common perceptions of the black majority ANC government as corrupt, especially during the build-up to the 2009 national election. Talking about corruption in South African soccer usually opened up informal conversations about their attitudes towards government officials; a racial causality sometimes emerged here as well. Of those who would talk to me about their voting plans, all had resolved to vote for the largest

²⁹ Author interview with 'Lee' (United), 25/03/2009.

³⁰ Author interview with 'Bryan' (United), 22/04/2009.

³¹ Author interview with 'Gary' (United), 14/05/2009.

³² Author interview with 'Nelson' (Chiefs), 12/01/2009.

³³ Author interview with 'Lee' (United), 25/03/2009.

³⁴ Author interview with 'Tom' (United), 12/06/2009.

³⁵ Author interview with 'George' (United), 06/03/2009.

opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). Contextualising this, the Chiefs games that I attended in the months leading to the election were a cauldron of pro-ANC and often pro-Zuma support with banners such as *“President Zuma will lead us from prison if arrested”*.³⁶ Furthermore, some Chiefs supporters wore ANC t-shirts along with their Chiefs ones. This in turn reinforced the resistance of the United supporters to the domestic game.

It is necessary to state that following United was not simply a white pastime. While the primary loyalty for the Chiefs supporters lay with Kaizer Chiefs, every member claimed an affinity to a European club, most of whom coincidentally followed Manchester United. Yet, while the United supporters generally chose to stay away from the domestic game, the Chiefs supporters found their access to the European game restricted through their relative lack of income. Although they could connect to a global nexus of United followers, a lack of disposable income restricted their participation in this community to the margins. At the time of fieldwork, only two members had Dstv, although this number has since increased. Of these two, only Gerald had the full package, which allowed him to watch the extended coverage of the English game; Arsenal was the team that he favoured because of their recent history of African players in the team.³⁷ The Chiefs supporters equated the racial divisions within Johannesburg soccer fandom with income and social class; *“They [the whites] have more English soccer because they have dish [satellite television]”*,³⁸ argued Nelson. This view was supported by other supporters who complained that they could not afford it. The full subscription allowed United supporters to access multiple European competitions, while in contrast, the Chiefs supporters were limited to English Premier League highlights and occasional Champions League fixtures.

Entanglements, interactions and boundary crossing

If this paper ended here, the Johannesburg soccerscape would appear a purely divided and dislocated space, with white suburban English soccer supporters identifying with the European, and specifically English game, in contrast to the Africanised spaces of domestic football. The soccerscape would be plagued by feelings of marginalisation, whether materially or emotionally. Fear and misunderstanding of the other would entrench these attitudes, identities and divisions in a pessimistic legacy of apartheid. However, it does not end there. The soccerscape also offer opportunities to challenge these divisions. It is on the edges of these boundaries where Nuttall’s series of entanglements take place, where the supporters begin to interact with the other and generate new understandings of them.

Not all of the United supporters believed the concept of domestic soccer as an unsafe space. Working for a sponsor of Chiefs in the 1980s, one supporter Bryan had been to Chiefs game. Despite initial trepidation as a lone white man heading into Soweto, he recalled these times in a positive light, despite police violence; *“They [the police] were sjamboking the fans and I just stood there as I just thought, “I’m the only white here”, but they sort of just ignored me. Didn’t put me off”*.³⁹ Both Eric and Darren, two of the younger members of the supporters’

³⁶ Entry in research diary, 21/03/2009.

³⁷ Author interview with ‘Gerald’ (Chiefs), 26/07/2009.

³⁸ Author interview with ‘Nelson’ (Chiefs), 12/01/2009.

³⁹ Author interview with ‘Bryan’ (United), 22/04/2009.

club, believed that the fear of crime articulated by the vast majority of the group was over-inflated and clouded the reality of domestic soccer. Eric argued that this discourse of crime was *“the biggest block against white South Africans”*⁴⁰ participating in domestic soccer fandom. Darren had been to a Soweto derby in 1996 at FNB Stadium on the outskirts of Soweto. Far from feeling intimidated as he only *“saw one other white person the whole day”*,⁴¹ he was overwhelmed by the welcome he received, shaking *“over 200 peoples’ hands there”*.⁴² Darren and Eric’s optimistic outlook on domestic soccer was indicative of their wider, more positive attitudes towards the city.

One event in particular created a new series of encounters with the other. Through the interviews and time spent with the United supporters, they became aware of the simultaneous research with the Kaizer Chiefs supporters. The questions that were asked about why they did not go to the local game sparked curiosity and self-reflexivity. Seven members expressed an interest in coming with me to the Soweto Derby between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates in May 2009. Simultaneously, the awareness of the research with the United supporters had led to the committee of the Chiefs supporters’ branch to request that I recruit white soccer fans to the branch. Acting as the unwitting conduit between these two groups, it was arranged that those who were interested in going would accompany the Chiefs supporters club to the derby. Eventually, only three members came but brought family and friends with them.

In the two months after the derby game, I interviewed the United supporters who had crossed the borders of Johannesburg football fandom. One important motivation for these people was knowing someone who had a knowledge of the domestic game and was able to organise people to come together. For Denis, the game itself was not that important but actually knowing other people who were willing to go:

*“It could have been Moroka Swallows versus whoever. It wouldn’t have made any difference. ‘Guys, we’re setting aside a day to go to the football, do you want to come?’”*⁴³

Gary had similarly explained that he would not have thought about going had I not given him both the idea and the means to go. Darren had shown interest in coming with me to Wits and Chiefs games early on after I had first made contact with the United supporters. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the United supporters felt isolated from the domestic game because they did not know other people interested in going. However, Gary developed this thought, arguing that even if he did have friends who would have been interested in going, he still would not have gone:

“I’ve always wanted to go to, a Chiefs v Pirates game but I wouldn’t go if I just had to get a couple of mates without going with a few regular Chiefs supporters. I don’t think I’d go to the game. Simply safety reasons and that type of thing”.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Author interview with ‘Eric’ (United), 17/04/2009.

⁴¹ Author interview with ‘Darren’ (United), 25/06/2009.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Author interview with ‘Denis’ (United), 19/05/2009.

⁴⁴ Author interview with ‘Gary’ (United), 19/05/2009.

For Gary, going with a small group of friends did not assuage feelings of uncertainty about being part of a very small minority of white fans at a domestic soccer game. Yet, the way that I had marketed the invitation to the United supporters, focusing on the key concerns of crime and safety at the match and emphasising that members of Malvern branch had offered to look after them had at least partially neutralised such fears.

Darren and Denis had wanted to see how the domestic game had developed, especially in relation to crime and organisation since the last time they attended a domestic match, other than when Manchester United was playing. For Denis, this was the advent of multi-racial soccer in South Africa in the 1970s and his perception that a number of black soccer fans were acting as hooligans; the atmosphere was *“becoming dicey”*.⁴⁵ Darren had been to four games since he moved to South Africa in 1995 but he too had experienced a volatile atmosphere:

“The one derby I was at was really quite hectic. There was hundreds of bottles flying in each direction; the okes [people] were getting really aggro with each other”.⁴⁶

Ticketing and crowd issues in the south stand underlined that much still needed to be done in terms of organisation and crowd education, but Darren and Denis were delighted that they enjoyed the overall experience. The local game was no longer a dangerous space, and domestic soccer fans were not intimidating. They had become attracted to the manner in which supporters of Chiefs and Pirates supported their teams. The vibrant colours of the *makarapas* and robes combined with the blowing and waving of *vuvuzelas* had created an exhilarating atmosphere in which they were excited to be.

*“Just the sights and the sounds and the kit and clothing and the extent the local supporters go to, to show their allegiance... That was great!”*⁴⁷

The comparisons with the matchday experience at Old Trafford, which were often more favourable to the latter, had been reversed in these instances. The domestic soccer stadium was in this sense not a space of crime, grime and corruption but a more positive one that revealed central Johannesburg in a vibrant, carnival-esque light. Their assessment on the standard and style of play further reflected this more positive reappraisal of the domestic game. Although still believing that the English Premier League was of a higher technical standard, Gary believed that the domestic game was far better than many of his fellow United supporters thought it to be; *“the football isn’t great. It’s not bad, it really isn’t too bad. I think South African football is on the up”*.⁴⁸ However, even at this point where new understandings of the city’s soccerscape were being formed by these United supporters, the interview process served further reminders of the divisions that existed. Gary was so excited by his experience at the derby that he declared:

⁴⁵ Author interview with ‘Denis’ (United), 19/05/2009.

⁴⁶ Author interview with ‘Darren’ (United), 25/06/2009.

⁴⁷ Author interview with ‘Denis’ (United), 19/05/2009.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

*“The R20 entrance fee really, I mean, honestly, it’s a game where I would be willing to pay R300 – 400 because it really is worth it”.*⁴⁹

In his interview, Denis described the reaction of his work colleagues when he returned to work the next week:

*“Only on Monday when I got back to the office (laughs) and they said “What?” and I took out the stub and showed them that I’d been to the game and this was just too much for most of them. That umlungu, the white boss that’s actually been to the game!”*⁵⁰

The surprise of his predominantly black colleagues when seeing the ticket stub as evidence of being at the Soweto derby echoed the reaction of many of the United supporters earlier in the fieldwork when they discovered that I regularly attended PSL matches and travelled to areas that they would generally be reluctant to. To consider the wider implications of this, it is important to return to Manchester United’s 2008 tour of South Africa. When those Chiefs supporters in Cape Town asserted the claim that domestic soccer was a ‘black’ cultural space, this assumed that non-black soccer fans did not belong there. Those who did go regularly were constructed as an oddity, which was reinforced through their reactions to my presence there, and later the reactions of Malvern branch to the United supporters. It is not just soccer that this speaks to but the wider landscape of the city. In the post-apartheid city, spatial boundaries are still often delineated by race. The willingness of these white, middle class United supporters to transcend these social boundaries underlines that around the margins of everyday life in the city are challenges to the orthodox understanding of racial divisions in South Africa.

Conclusion

There is so much more that can, and should be said about the Johannesburg soccerscape. This paper has briefly touched upon class, while gender has been virtually sidelined, a fault which needs to be rectified in future research, both by myself and other sports sociologists. It is therefore imperative that the sociology of sport in South Africa develop and expand so that it is able to tackle such issues and concepts.

It is often extremely difficult to escape the discourse of race surrounding South African football, and Johannesburg soccer fandom in particular. The construction of domestic soccer as a black cultural space by both supporters clubs is regularly articulated. It is compounded by a media that reinforces that often reinforces the concept of the white soccer fan and player as an outsider and a novelty in the domestic arena. The well-known Orlando Pirates supporter, Dejan Miladinovic, often appears in newspapers as Pirates’ ‘white supporter’, with *The Star* printing a whole-page article about him in November 2008 because he was white. Similarly, media discourses exceptionalising the whiteness of Bafana Bafana players such as Matthew Booth during the 2009 Confederations Cup and the 2010 World Cup, and more recently with midfielder Dean Furman during this year’s Africa Cup of Nations further

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Author interview with ‘Denis’ (United), 19/05/2009.

reinforce such divisions. Members from both case studies often used race to articulate their understandings of divisions and difference in soccer fandom, and this does not look like changing anytime soon.

Yet, by viewing Johannesburg soccer fandom as divided along such lines fails to recognise the fluidity that occurs. Taking a creolisation approach provides a theoretical crowbar, offering an opportunity to understand the soccerscape as something more than simply divided. Football in the city has provided opportunities for football supporters to experience these mutual entanglements and encounters. Interest from some of the United supporters in experiencing the domestic game combined with excitement from the Chiefs supporters that they were able to connect with soccer supporters beyond the boundaries of Johannesburg soccer fandom was evidence that these people wanted to interact with their surrounds in ways that did not necessarily fit with these divisions. The Soweto Derby in May 2009 further illustrated these interactions. Moments interspersed throughout the game broke through these barriers such as Chiefs equalising goal. Hugging, cheering and then analysing the passage of play, white and black, middle class and working class fans connected primarily as soccer supporters. The change and development in the attitudes towards the domestic game from a small number of football supporters suggests Outside of these case studies, it is apparent that such encounters regularly occur in South African football today. Attend a local football match and you will see football fans from different backgrounds supporting 'their' teams, speaking to each other and blowing vuvuzelas together, even if this only happens in small numbers. These encounters provide opportunities for socialisation to occur and for new identities to emerge. Domestic football thus becomes recoded, at least in these moments. However, despite emphasising the creole and highlighting moments where alternative understandings of Johannesburg football fandom can emerge, the megaliths of race and class are unavoidable.

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